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COMMON SENSE HORSEMANSHIP:

A Safe And Simple Approach To Riding Horses



SHELLY
INGRAM

Page Turner Press



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CREDITS

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INTRODUCTION

This book is intended for the first time rider. If you have always wanted to get involved with horses but just never knew where to start this is the book for you! Included is background information on a wide variety of breeds and riding disciplines geared to helping you choose the one that is right for you. You'll learn strategies for finding a teacher, exercises to get you ready for lessons and what to expect from those lessons. Think of it as a "leg up" on a fun, safe and successful riding career!

ABOUT ME



Photo by Tass Jones Photography

Shelly Ingram is a third generation horsewoman who currently lives in Northern California where she is a barn manager at a horse retirement facility. She has written for magazines and newspapers on a variety of topics. She began riding at an early age and has apprenticed with several of the top trainers in the United States. During the span of her 30 year career she trained winning show horse and rider combinations on the local, regional and national levels in a variety of disciplines. She also galloped race horses and conditioned competitive endurance horses as well as designed equestrian facilities. She served as a 4H judging team coach and was a recognized horse show judge and clinician for more than a decade.

CHAPTER ONE – CHOOSING THE RIGHT HORSE AND RIDING STYLE FOR YOU

People come in all shapes, sizes, and temperaments and the same is true of horses. There are hundreds of breeds, all established for specific reasons by those with a passion for a certain attribute. When you start thinking you want to learn to ride a horse, the most logical first step is to look into all the different options available to you and see which kind of horse suits your goals and personality. All disciplines are concerned with “equitation” or the ability of the rider to control the horse and demonstrate that control, but there are many different ways to enjoy learning to do that. You can’t pair a tap dancer with a ballet artist and expect perfect harmony. Likewise, it’s important to determine a good horse and rider combination.

If you are a person who enjoys detail and precision, who can see the beauty of a perfectly symmetrical circle, then you may want to look into Dressage. But if you picture yourself as a reincarnation of Gary Cooper and long to ride across the open plains or herd cattle down the trail with Charles Goodnight, the Western style of riding is probably more to your liking.

The two can be combined in the reining division for those who just can’t decide where their calling lies.

More into the drama and beauty of a Broadway show? Then the flash and style of the Saddle Type breeds could be just for you. Do you picture yourself on the back of a beautiful hunter chasing hounds across a field or completing a clean jumping round at the Olympics? Consider the hunter or jumper disciplines.

Whatever breed or discipline you decide on you can count of a couple of things.

1. Ask ten horse people a simple question and you are very likely to get ten different answers.
2. The teacher or trainer you are talking to will tell you that their way, if not the only way, is the BEST way.

This is simply not true. As one old trainer used to say, “Riding consists of keeping one leg on each side of the horse.” The basics of good

riding are the same: balance, timing, and consistency. There is merit to most styles of riding and something can be learned from all of them. Approach horses and riding with an open mind. By really understanding what you are trying to do, you can achieve success even if your methods don't exactly match someone else's. By approaching horses in this way, you will become a "horseman" and not just a rider or someone who parrots a prescribed method without really understanding why or how it works or doesn't work.

The most important thing to keep in mind when learning to ride is **safety**. Never do anything that puts you in a position in which you feel uncomfortable or out of control. I don't mean never push yourself or get a bit out of your comfort zone, but don't do anything to satisfy someone else's ego or follow a guru blindly. Working with horses is not the same as taking up tennis; you can't just start hitting balls around the court. First of all, *you* may come out of the experience just fine — but a horse is a living animal and deserves respect and understanding before you start imposing your will on them. At the very least you should have some idea how to communicate with horses.

Learning to be a horseman takes a long time and you must learn to use your eyes and ears, as well as develop your common sense if you want to really get to know how to work with and around horses.

The best advice I ever got was, "Keep your eyes open and your mouth shut." Believe me, you can learn a lot from watching, but you have to know what you are seeing first.

*All terms listed in the glossary

What's your Style?

WESTERN

There are many different facets of Western riding with a division to appeal to almost every type of person.

Pleasure

The Western pleasure horse is prized for a slow and even way of going.* In shows the Western horse is judged on a pleasant attitude and rolling, comfortable gaits* with the rider seated comfortably on the horse's back. Horses are shown on a loose rein with a level or low headset*, generally at the walk, jog, and lope in both directions of an arena. Quarter Horses are often used as the benchmark for Western

pleasure horses; their muscular build and even disposition suit the discipline perfectly.



Photo courtesy of Jennifer Buxton

The position of the horse's head and neck can vary from breed to breed with Morgan, Saddlebreds, and Arabians tending to go with a slightly higher headset, which suits their beautiful heads and shapely necks. These two photos not only show the two different breed styles but also the two acceptable styles of handling the reins.



Photo courtesy of Jim Wright Horse Photography and Cantrell Arabians

The Quarter Horse is being shown in “split” reins, allowing the rider to have a finger between the reins that come into his hand from the top of his index finger.

The Arabian is being shown with “rommel” reins that enter the rider’s closed hand from the little finger side; no fingers are allowed between the reins.

If you are a calm person who enjoys working on an even keel, this may be the way to go for you. The outfits worn and tack used in Western pleasure add a great deal to the overall picture of this discipline. Silver and hand carved leather and an appreciation for Western style attire, is an added attraction.

Trail

Trail horses, both in and out of the show ring, attract a person who enjoys detail. It can be the details of the scenery on a mountain ride, knowing the recovery time* of your horse and fellow endurance competitor, or maneuvering tight obstacles in a show ring. Trail horses are taught to perform certain tasks based in convenience, but these tasks can become quite elaborate. For example, a well-trained trail horse allows the rider to open and close a gate while mounted, step over and through a series of downed logs (or in the show ring, “walk or jog over” poles), and back around and through different obstacles, often while carrying an object.



Photo Courtesy of © [Jeanne Provost](#) | [Dreamstime.com](#)

If you have a passion for detail and enjoy working on puzzles, this could be your calling. Horses that excel at show and pleasure trail riding tend to do best if they are of a mellow disposition and compact body; being well muscled doesn't hurt if the trails you tackle are real ones and not of the show variety.

Many pleasure trail riders in recent years have found the gaited breeds* such as Peruvian Pasos, Paso Finos, Foxtrotters, Tennessee

Walking Horses, or Icelandic Horses to be ideal for their purpose. These horses are extremely smooth; the ultimate test of this is the rider's ability to carry a full glass of champagne (or any liquid) while the horse is moving without spilling a single drop. These horses can be a great choice for people with back issues, and since they are also bred for stamina, a long trail ride is generally easy for them.



Photo Courtesy of Janetta Michaels

For those who enjoy a more rigorous ride, competitive or endurance trail riding may be the answer. Competitive trail riders spend long hours in the saddle conditioning their horses in order to earn points and awards for completing rides at a fast pace. Endurance riders and horses can be likened to the “ironmen/women” competitors who push themselves to the limits. They compete in rides that require the completion of 50—100 miles in one day, no easy task when the ride covers terrain in the Sierra Nevada Mountains as it does during the

famous Western States 100 mile ride popularly called the Tevis Cup. During competitions, riders and horses must pass a series of vet checks en route to ensure that they are in no danger of over-exertion.



Photo Courtesy of Western States Trail Foundation and Hughes Photography

Reining and Cow Work

If you like the idea of something faster but prefer to compete in an arena with a set goal in mind, you may want to consider the reining or cow horse aspects of Western riding. Reining horses perform intricate patterns demonstrating a change of lead,* spinning, and long sliding stops, all at designated speeds. This is often referred to as “dry work”.



Photo Courtesy of Chris and Ernie Oswald and Laura Pennebaker

Cow horses can be specialists in “cutting” where a horse and rider chose a cow from a small herd and work the cow back and forth at a distance from the herd. This is generally called “wet work”.



Photo Courtesy of Ernie and Chris Oswald and Kat Rodgers Equine Designs

Or they can work a cow “down the fence” as in the reined cow horse division. This class requires the horse and rider to not only keep the cow from its herd, but turn it down the arena fence and confine it to a figure eight before releasing it. Both are exciting and fast moving variations on the everyday duties of a cowboy. Recent years have also seen a rise in team penning where two or three riders join forces to corral cattle in a timed scoring event.

SPEED EVENTS / RODEO

If nothing will do for you but to be in the thick of the old West, then rodeo may be the sport for you. Most rodeo events are timed. Events range from barrel racing, where a series of three barrels set in a triangle are taken in a cloverleaf pattern by a horse and rider as fast as possible, to the eight second rides required to score on bareback and saddle “broncs” (equine specialists in bucking or removing the rider from their backs).



Photo Courtesy of © [Michael Klenetsky](#) | [Dreamstime.com](#)

You could also consider roping if the cowboy way intrigues you, but it requires not only learning to control your horse, but also excellent hand-eye coordination to get the rope around the part of the cow you are aiming for! There is also a good reason that many old ropers are missing fingers: a fast dally of the rope around the saddle horn can include an occasional finger.

DRESSAGE

Dressage has vastly gained popularity in recent years since the first recognized usage of the word in 1936 when it was considered the realm of cavalry officers. The term comes from the French word *dresser* which means to train or drill. The word “dressage” with a lowercase “d” is defined by the *Merriam-Webster* dictionary as “the execution by a trained horse of precision movements in response to barely perceptible signals from its rider.”

The higher levels of this discipline are dominated by the Warmblood breeds but any horse and rider combination can benefit from this type of training as it serves as the basis for most modern training methods.



Photo Courtesy of © [Cmoats](#) | [Dreamstime.com](#)

Dressage with a capital “D” is further defined as a recognized Olympic sport with clear stages of development ranging from Pre-Training Level to Grand Prix. The lower levels feature a series of set tests while the higher levels allow riders to create their own performance similar to the programs designed by gymnasts or ice skaters and similarly are often set to music. Scores are given to both the horse and rider as they execute a series of figures and maneuvers that demonstrate the athletic ability of the horse that can only be achieved by years of training.

Tests are performed in either a small 20 x 40 meter (about 66 feet x 132 feet) arena or a standard 20 x 60 meter (about 66 feet x 198 feet) arena. A low rail defines the outline of the arena and letters are placed around the arena to provide reference points for the rider. These letters are AKVESHCMRBPF with DLXIG assumed but not marked down center line between A and C for the standard arena. (Many people like to use an acronym to remember the required letters such as “All Kindly Very Eccentric Showmen Hone Championship Methods Riding Big Powerful Fillies”.)

Dressage training stresses the development of collected and extended gaits and harmony between horse and rider. While everyone can benefit from some dressage training or instruction, it is a very precise sport that focuses on the minute details of the performance. It has been described by some observers as “like watching cement set” but it is challenging to those who like detail. Previously dominated by the German riders and trainers who stressed the “drilling” aspect of the discipline, in recent years the Dutch have become extremely competitive with a more flowing style. At the 2012 Olympics, the British riders for the first time dominated the winner’s circle demonstrating a more relaxed yet no less precise style.

HUNT OR FORWARD SEAT

When most people think or speak of “English” riding, this is the style of saddle and horse that comes to mind. Originally brought to America from England, it is generally associated with horses with a longer stride and frame* as well as a faster way of going than a Western horse. This style of riding is all about “forward” motion and is seen in hunters and jumpers, polo ponies, and English pleasure horses.



Photo Courtesy of Dr. Peter Harris, Dr. Nelle Slack and Tass Jones Photography

Horses are said to walk, trot, and canter as well as gallop and hand gallop. Riders “post” the trot—rising from the saddle in rhythm with the diagonal movement of the horse’s legs. Horses ridden in shows in this style, do not jump and are said to be ridden “on the flat”; those that do jump are ridden “over fences”. When horses are ridden outside of the arena on a trail ride to relax from training, they are being “hacked”.

Many types of horses are ridden in this style and most breed shows have English Divisions that include pleasure, equitation, hunter, and jumper classes. An English pleasure horse will be asked to perform all

gaits (in Arabian shows this includes a hand gallop in the open divisions) and will be judged on the way of going and the appearance of an easy ride.

Hunters

The hunter has its origins in the fox hunting field and is valued for the horse's ability to jump fences in a steady and rhythmic way thereby not overtiring itself on a long day in the field. Show hunters can be shown in hand and on the flat but the focus of this discipline is a mannerly, excellent performance over fences.



Photo Courtesy of Sterling Equine Investments and Captured Moment Photography

Jumps for hunters are no higher than 4' 3" in height and generally feature more natural colors and designs than the jumping arena. Manners and temperament are stressed, as well as exactness of form; this includes achieving an exact number of strides set between fences. A stride is generally accepted to be 12 feet for horses.

Hunter horses must be perfectly straight over the fence with the forearm parallel to the ground, the knees and lower legs even, the lower legs tucked under forearms as the horse takes the fence, bending his fetlocks and knees. Horses must show *bascule*, or roundness over a jump. Think of the way a dolphin looks jumping out of the water—back up, head reaching forward and down—this is the goal for a good hunter over a fence.

Jumpers

Show jumping in its current form appeared in the Olympics in 1912. Its current popularity is due not only to its exciting nature, but also its suitability as a spectator sport easily understood and adaptable to television. Horses are not judged on form but the number of “faults” they receive. The winner has the lowest number of points or faults. A horse and rider who have not accumulated any jumping faults or penalty points are said to have scored a "clear round." Tied entries usually have a jump-off over a raised and shortened course, and the course is timed; if tied for faults accrued in the jump-off, the fastest time wins.



Photo Courtesy of © [Shariff Che' Lah](#) | [Dreamstime.com](#)

Jumping classes are held over a course of obstacles, including verticals, spreads, double and triple [combinations](#), turns, and changes of direction. The goal is to jump without a knock down or time fault over a set course within an allotted time. Time faults are assessed for exceeding the preset time designated for the course. Jumping faults are acquired for knockdowns and refusals (when the horse stops at a fence or "runs out", which means goes around a fence). Horses are generally allowed two refusals before being disqualified, but a refusal may lead to exceeding the time allowed on course.

Cross Country and Eventing

The three day event or “eventing” (also known as horse trials) is basically a riding triathlon — a three phase competition featuring Dressage, show jumping, and cross country jumping. The event began as a comprehensive [cavalry](#) test requiring mastery of several types of riding. It can be a one-day event (ODE), in which all three events are completed in one day (Dressage, followed by show jumping, and then cross country) or a three-day event (3DE), now often completed over four days, with Dressage on the first two days, followed by cross country the next day, and then show jumping with riders competing in reverse order on the final day.



Photo Courtesy of © [E. Spek](#) | [Dreamstime.com](#)

Cross country jumping is primarily considered an endurance test, and can be a single competition known as hunter trials or simply "cross country" although these tend to be lower level, local competitions. The object is to prove the speed, endurance, and jumping ability of a well-trained and conditioned [horse](#) and also to show the rider's knowledge of pace and the ability of the horse. It is fun and exciting, but also requires years of training and considerable nerve —not for the faint hearted!

Courses consist of 12–20 fences (lower levels), or 30–40 at the higher levels, placed on a long outdoor circuit. Very solidly built natural

objects (telephone poles, stone walls, etc.) and [ponds, streams](#), ditches, [drops and banks](#), and [combinations](#) are common. Courses are given an “optimum time”; crossing the finish line after the optimum time results in penalties for each additional second. At lower levels, there is also a speed fault time, with faults given to those completing the course too quickly. Disobedience penalties are added to the competitor’s Dressage score. Riders are eliminated after 4 disobediences altogether or 3 disobediences at one fence for going off course, (i.e., missing a fence) and if there is a fall of the horse or rider.

SADDLE TYPE / SADDLE SEAT

Horses with a naturally upright neck and high head carriage, as well as animated gaits and high action*, are best suited to the saddle seat style. The discipline developed in America beginning with the horses bred for use on the vast plantations of the South and culminating in the perfection of the breeds identified with their “showy” high action leg movement, and dramatic bearing.



Photo Courtesy of Avis Girdler Photography

The American Saddlebred, known for many years as “the Peacock of

the Show Ring”, is the most probable source of the name of this discipline. But many other breeds are also associated with this type of riding, including the [National Show Horse](#), [Tennessee Walking Horse](#), [Racking Horse](#), [Spotted Saddle Horse](#), [Morgan](#), and [Arabian](#). In addition, [Hackneys](#), [Paso Finos](#), [Missouri Foxtrotters](#), [Rocky Mountain Horses](#), [Friesians](#), and [Andalusians](#) are also shown in this style.

The saddles used are flat leather saddles of the English type but are referred to as “cut back” saddles because they have a small area cut out of the pommel (the front, raised part of the saddle) that allows for the saddle to sit comfortably on a higher headed horse. Many people believe that saddle seat riders sit farther back on a horse than their counterparts in other disciplines but this is largely an illusion caused by the change in the horse’s frame from the long, low silhouette of the hunter to one with a higher, more collected head carriage. Riders also carry their hands higher, allowing them to maintain a straight line to the horse’s mouth.



Photo Courtesy of Avis Girdler Photography

As in the other English disciplines, riders post the trot and perform a walk, trot, and canter as well as other gaits that include the running walk, slow gait, and rack. Horses are shown in double Weymouth

bridles similar to those used in higher level Dressage competition. Riders adopt a showy style with colorful coats and belled “Kentucky jods” of similar or coordinating colors.

Saddlebreds are best known as show horses with the pinnacle of performance considered to be the Five Gaited Horse, but they have excelled in many disciplines. Believed by many to be highly strung and nervous, Saddlebreds have proven to be excellent athletes and have shined in many divisions including reining and Dressage. But if you are drawn to drama and flash, the Saddle Type horse, be it Morgan, National Show Horse, Friesian, or Arabian, may be for you.

DRIVING

If you like the idea of horses but don't really want to sit on one, you may want to consider driving. Horses have been used to pull a wide variety of things from plows to carriages over the centuries.



Photo Courtesy of Avis Girdler Photography

Perhaps the idea of competing in a show ring with a high stepping fine harness horse or driving an obstacle course in a competitive combined driving event appeals to you. Driving can be fun and exciting and can involve one, two, and frequently four horses, but for a novice, it is definitely not a solo sport; you will need help and that includes not only with how to handle the reins and cart, but also knowing how to correctly hitch up and go.

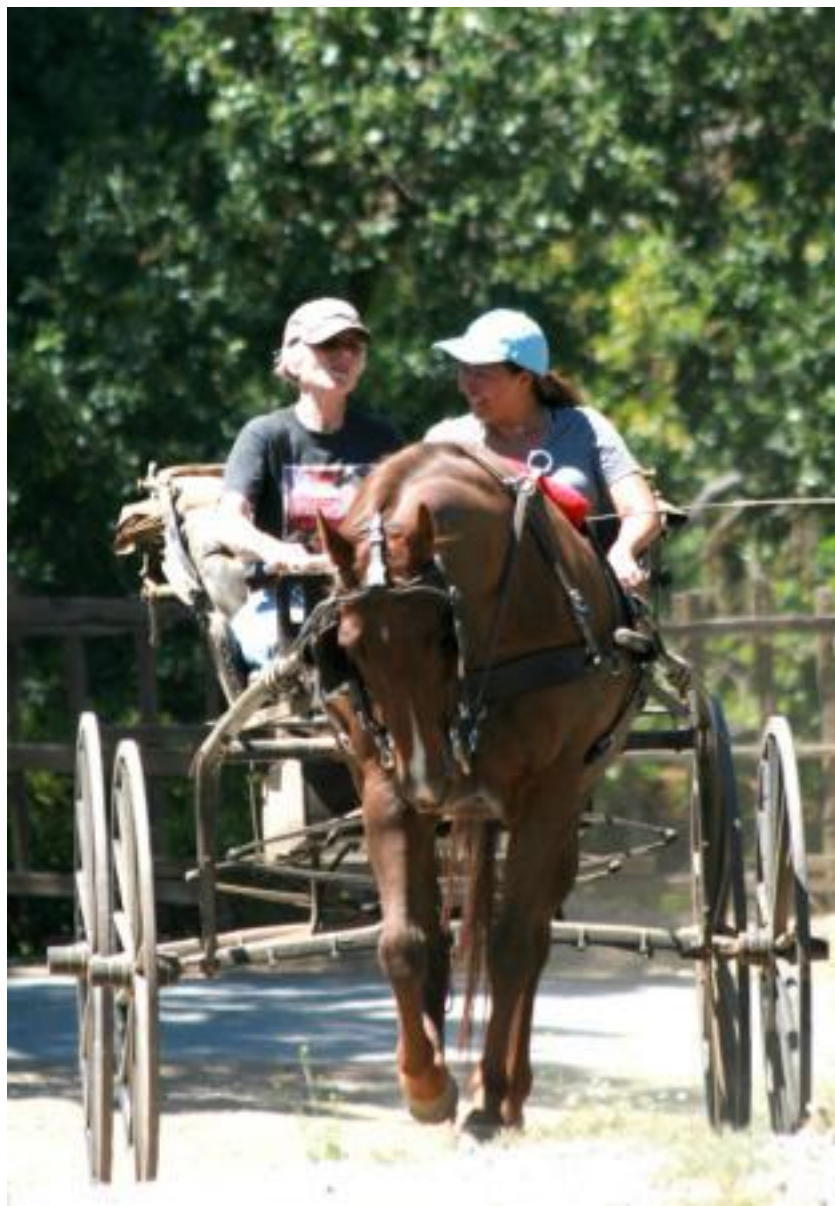


Photo courtesy of Alice Johnson

OTHER OPTIONS

If you have an interest in history, you may want to look into re-enactment groups. These associations bring history to life and are often looking for horses and riders or drivers to fill out their ranks, whether they represent Colonial American times, Civil War battles, or Pioneer Days. If you are really into the Old West, you may want to look into Cowboy Action shooting —a unique event that often

involves shooting from horseback as part of its target-based action.



Photo Courtesy of © Scott Griessel | Dreamstime.com

Or if you love horses but don't want to ride or drive, you might consider showmanship or halter showing. Many breeds have entire divisions devoted to in hand* or halter classes that are judged on the horse's conformation. There is also a division called showmanship which is judged solely on the way the handler shows the horse and its grooming and turnout.*



Photo Courtesy of Marilyn Silva

If you long to have something to do with horses but just cannot ride or be around a horse for whatever reason there is an outlet for you in the model horse world. You can collect these horses and keep them without fear of an overwhelming feed bill and there are shows and clubs all over the country. A great website to access <http://braymere.blogspot.com/>.



Photo courtesy of Jennifer Buxton

It's easy to see that whatever your personality, with a little research you can find a horse or a horse activity to complement it.

Breed List / Links to Associations

Horses are generally divided into three categories: hot blooded, cold blooded, and warm blooded.

Hot blooded horses are generally more highly strung, quicker, and more spirited than other types of horses. Thoroughbreds, Arabians, Barbs, and Akhal-Tekes are all hot blooded breeds.

Cold blooded horses are the large, heavy draft horses. The Percheron and Clydesdale, Belgian and Shire are cold blooded breeds.



Photo courtesy Alice Johnson

Warmbloods, as the name implies, combine both types. The modern usage of the term warmblood implies a “sport” horse. Several of the breeds, such as the American Quarter Horse, do sanction some Thoroughbreds in the breeding stock; however, Morgans and Trakehners have closed studbooks, meaning no non-breed blood is allowed in their registered animals. Many such breeds are named for the area in which they were first bred, such as the American Quarter Horse, American Saddlebred, Missouri Foxtrotter, Tennessee Walker, Hanoverian, Oldenburg, and East Friesian. The Paso Fino is another famous Warmblood breed.

Below is a list of organizations and web addresses to help you further research horse breeds and disciplines.

Oklahoma State University provides an exhaustive list of horse and pony breeds at

<http://www.ansi.okstate.edu/breeds/horses/>

Discipline list

All competitive disciplines and a good starting point for hunter/jumper disciplines:

USEF – United States Equestrian Federation — www.usef.org

Good starting point for Western disciplines:

AQHA – American Quarter Horse Association — www.aqha.com

Good starting point for saddle seat disciplines:

ASHA – American Saddlebred Horse Association — www.asha.net

List of Gaited Horse Associations:

<http://www.gaitedhorses.net/BreedRegistries.shtml>

Good starting point for Dressage:

USDF – United States Dressage Federation — www.usdf.org

Good starting points for trail riding:

NATRC — North American Trail Ride Conference – www.natrc.org

ACTHA - American Competitive Trail Horse Association — <https://www.actha.us>

Good starting points for cow horses:

ACHA -American Cutting Horse Association — www.achacutting.org

NCHA — National Cutting Horse Association — www.nchacutting.com

NRCHA – National Reined Cow Horse Association — www.nrcha.com

Good starting point for rodeo Information:

APRA – American Professional Rodeo Association — www.aprarodeo.com

List of Cowboy Action Shooting Associations:

SASS - Single Action Shooting Society – www.sassnet.com

CMSA – Cowboy Mounted Shooting Association — www.cowboymountedshooting.com

List of Gymkhana Associations:

<http://www.ohorse.com/equestrian-sports/gymkhana/organizations/local/north-america/united-states/>

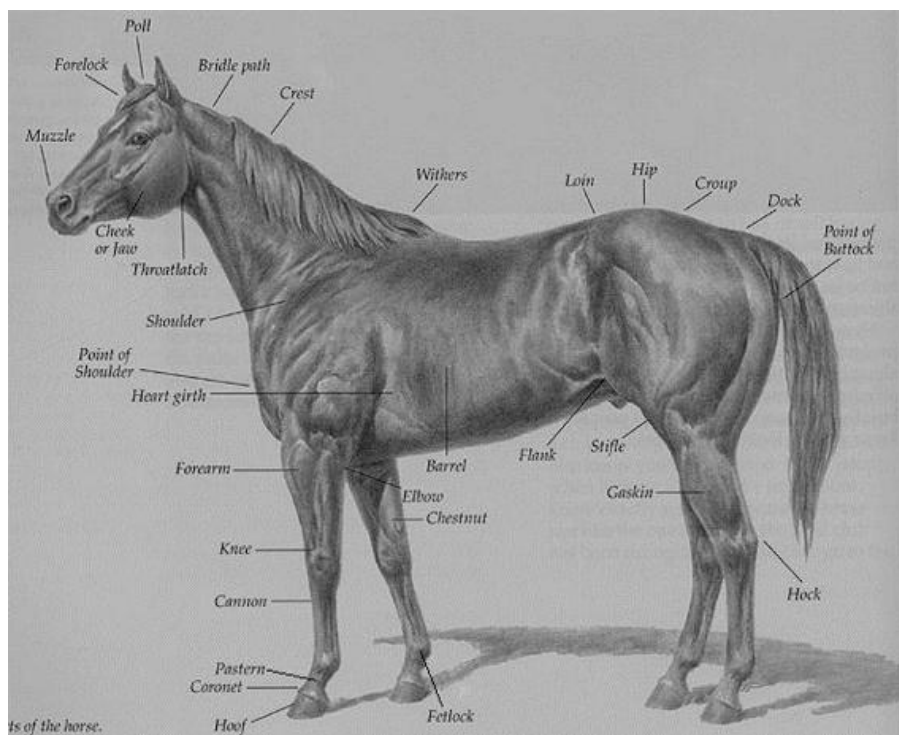
Good starting points for Driving:

<http://www.carriagedrivingessentials.com/index.html>

<http://www.americandrivingsociety.org/>

CHAPTER TWO – PARTS OF THE HORSE, SADDLES, BRIDLES, AND DIFFERENT BITS

Parts of the Horse



Below is a site that offers a great project manual that provides charts and explanations of the parts of the horse, as well as the horse's hooves, teeth, skeletal, and muscular structure:

[http://www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/\\$department/deptdocs.nsf/all/4h7933/\\$FILE/g_partsofhorse.pdf](http://www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/$department/deptdocs.nsf/all/4h7933/$FILE/g_partsofhorse.pdf)

The home page of this government site also offers a wealth of information:

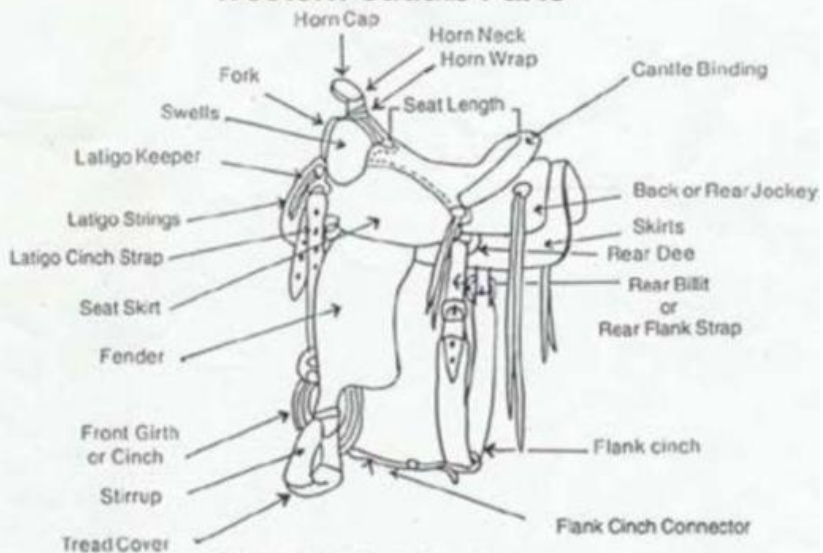
[http://www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/\\$department/deptdocs.nsf/all/4h7933](http://www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/$department/deptdocs.nsf/all/4h7933)

Saddles, Bridles, and Harness Links:

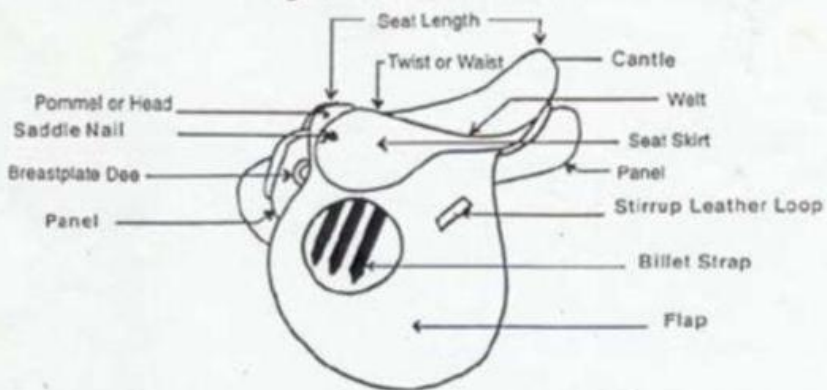
<http://extension.unh.edu/4H/4HLearnM/Ch1112.pdf>

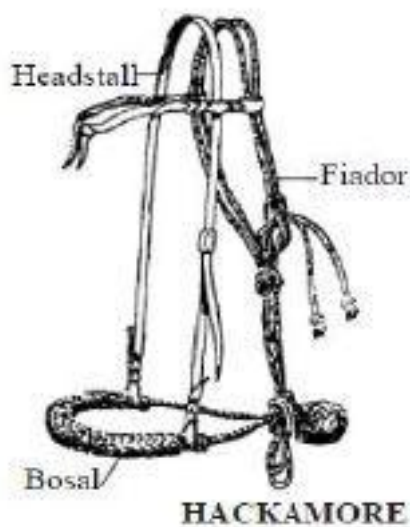
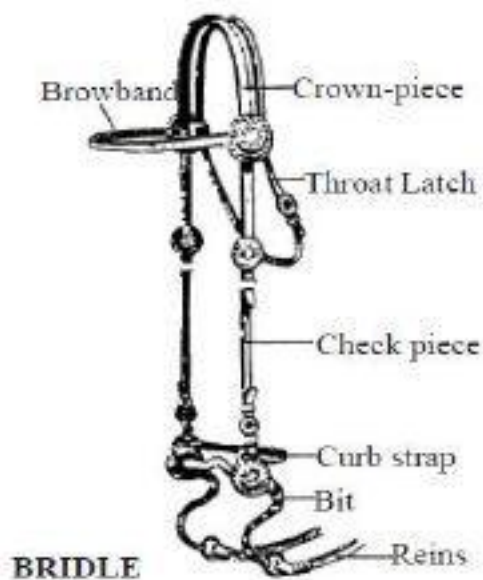
<http://4h.wsu.edu/EM2778CD/pdf/PNW229.pdf>

Western Saddle Parts



English Saddle Parts





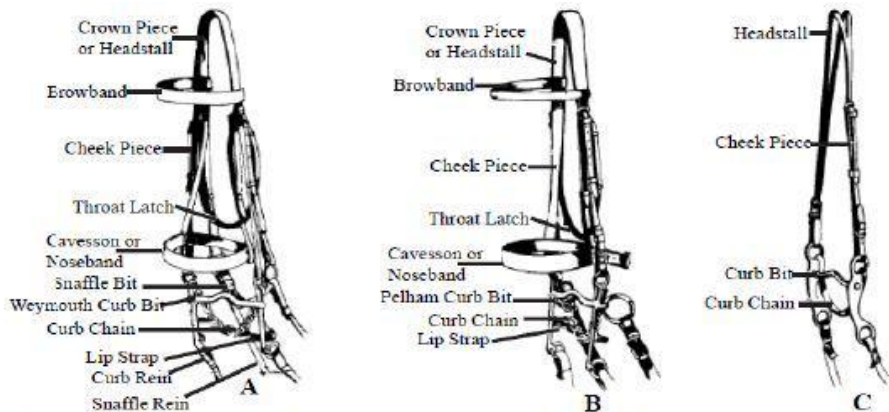
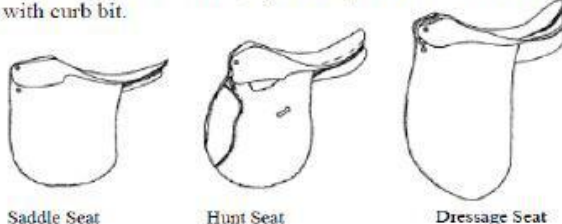
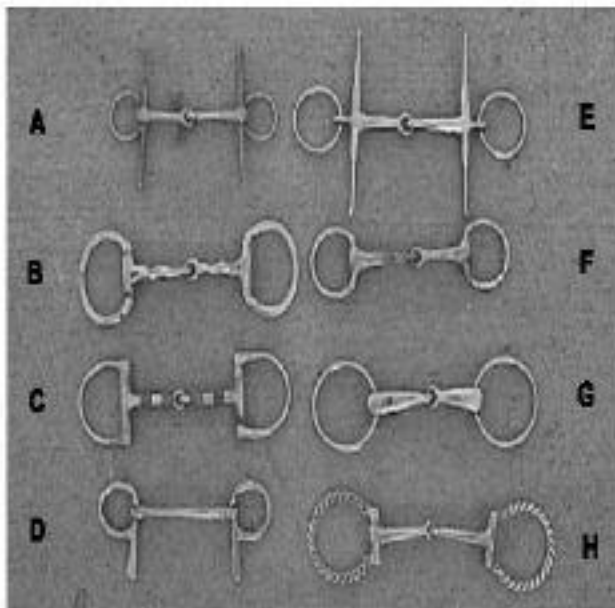


Figure 45. Three types of bridles: A) Full or Double bridle; B) Pelham, double-reined bridle; and C) Split-eared western bridle with curb bit.

Figure 46.
English Saddles.

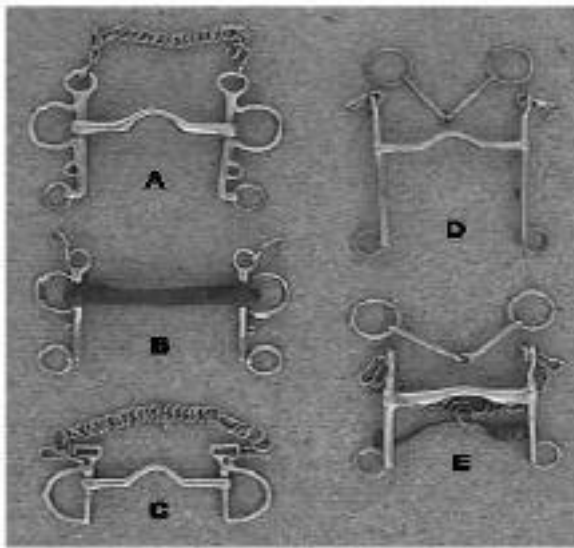


The bit is used to communicate with the horse, not as a way to punish or subdue it. A snaffle bit is a non-leverage bit while curb and spade bits are leverage bits. The bit should fit the width of the horse's mouth (average size is 5 inches) and be properly adjusted. Snaffle bits are usually correctly adjusted if they make one or two wrinkles in the corners of the horse's lips. Curb bits are usually fitted with one wrinkle or just moderate contact with the corners of the horse's mouth.



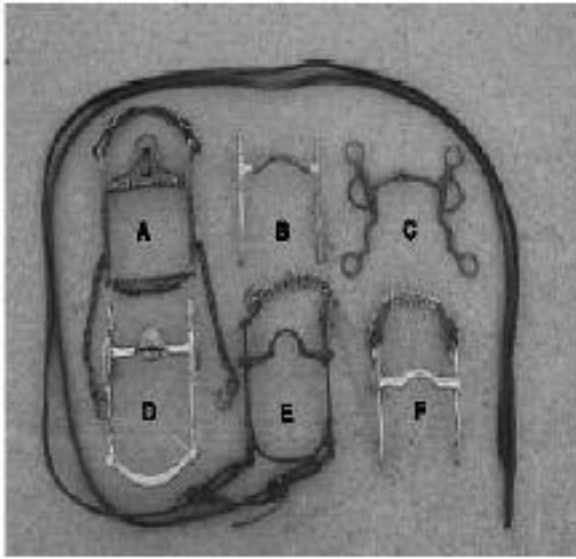
Types of Snaffle Bits

1. full cheek 4 1/2 inch mouth;
2. eggbutt 5 inch mouth with a slow twist;
3. D-ring with copper rollers;
4. mullen mouth spoon cheek;
5. fulmer snaffle;
6. eggbutt bridoon;
7. O-ring large diameter hollow mouth piece;
8. western D-ring, decorative rings.



Types of Pelham and Curb Bits

1. Pelham with medium port;
2. rubber mullen mouth pelham;
3. kimberwick, medium port;
4. weymouth low port, smooth bridoon;
5. curb with tongue relief, lipstrap and smooth bridoon.



Types of Western Bits

1. a spade bit with spoon port, braces, roller, slobber chains and rein chains;
2. a sweetwater copper mouth piece curb bit;
3. shanked sweet iron snaffle with two rein rings;
4. high copper covered port with cricket roller, decorative silver shanks;
5. medium port sweet iron curb bit;
6. low port grazing shank curb bit.

CHAPTER THREE – WATCHING HORSES AND BASIC TRAINING CONCEPTS

You can learn a lot from just watching horses. Spend some time watching how horses react to each other and what they do to get along with each other. If you see a horse put her ears back, it can mean that she is unhappy or wants another horse to move off but it can also mean the horse is listening to something behind her. The degree of how far back the ears are laid on the head means as much as the fact the ears are back or forward.



Photo courtesy of © Alfotokunst | Dreamstime.com

Horses are also vocal: They whinny, neigh, and nicker and will often call to other horses. Many people like to have their horse whinny at them as they approach, thinking it means they are glad to see them. This can be the case, but more often than not, as one old trainer used to say, “They just see a big bale of hay with arms and legs coming down the aisle way.”

Don’t get me wrong, it is *very* possible to form a bond with a horse and some horses will relate better to some people than to others; but they are horses, not people, and therefore have different motivations. Horses are herd animals, they enjoy company, and they are prey animals so they have a “flight” response to anything they deem as

threatening. Much has been made of this reaction in recent years and you will hear many training theories based on the horse's flight response.

Like all theories it has basis in fact, but horses today (with the exception of Mustangs in the United States and Brumbies in Australia) are not the wild horses of even the early part of the twentieth century. Most are fairly domesticated and consequently used to humans. You may hear reference to foals being "imprinted", which means that a human has handled them extensively from the time of their birth. The human moves their hands over the foal's body to establish a close relationship with the foal and therefore make him feel comfortable and unafraid around humans.

This practice is fine and can provide excellent results, but has it disadvantages, too. A horse doesn't need to fear you, but one that has no respect for you can also hurt you. Horses are big animals and when they walk over you, you will know it. It is sometimes better not to have a 1,000 pound animal try to jump in your lap when he gets scared, but rather to move away from you.

This brings up another interesting thing about horses. Unlike humans, they do not naturally move away from pressure. There are all kinds of theories for this, too, such as they feel safer within the pressing bodies of a herd, but the fact remains they have to be taught to move away from pressure. This is an important component of training because almost everything we do with horses as riders, drivers, and handlers involves them moving away from applied pressure.

Training horses is not complicated. The main thing is to be consistent and have a method that works toward a goal. The days of roping a horse, blindfolding him, throwing a saddle on, and bucking him out or "breaking" him have been gone for decades. These days, most trainers start by working a horse on the ground and then gradually introducing the horse to the saddle or cart.

This generally involves first teaching the horse to wear a halter, then how to lead. The horse should walk easily by your right shoulder while you have your right hand resting lightly approximately 18 inches down the rope with the end of the rope looped in your left hand—never wrapped around your hand.



Photo courtesy of Dr. Peter Harris, Phd and Dr. Nelle Slack, Phd

From here, the horse is taught to longe*(pronounced lunge) generally on a 25–30 foot longe line or rope in a round pen. Here the horse learns to walk, trot, canter, and stop on voice command. By using body position, the trainer gradually instills the idea of moving away from pressure into the horse's mind.



Photo courtesy of Dr. Peter Harris, Phd and Dr. Nelle Slack, Phd

Once the horse can longe easily, she will then be introduced to a biting rig or surcingle. This strap that goes around the horse's belly lets them get used to the feeling of a girth or cinch. Later, the trainer will attach reins to the bit and get the horse used to moving away from pressure in the mouth. Still later, long lines or driving reins will be attached that allow the trainer to guide the horse from the ground just as they would from the saddle, with the pressure of the long lines on the horse's sides also vaguely simulating the leg pressure they will feel when ridden.



Photo courtesy of Dr. Peter Harris, PhD and Dr. Nelle Slack, PhD

Finally the saddle will be placed on the horse and the whole process repeated. Once the horse is comfortable with these lessons on the ground, a rider will get on. Some people prefer to have an assistant hold the horse's head for the first few times they mount the horse, while others like to be the sole focus of the horse's attention—whatever works. Once the rider is on the horse, the same lessons are repeated again and then gradually added to until the horse understands the transition.



Photo courtesy of Dr. Peter Harris, PhD and Dr. Nelle Slack, PhD

Most horses will accept the saddle and rider easily the first or second time, but as most trainers know, it is the fourth or fifth ride when they are bored with the new game and they may show some resistance.

Starting young horses is not for beginning riders—it takes timing and skill—you may not get hurt but you won't be doing the horse any favors. Most good trainers will admit that they ruined a few horses learning their craft.

CATCHING AND HALTERING

All this training starts by being able to catch and halter the horse... now that may sound simple, but you see it done incorrectly all the time. Lots of people seem to have great difficulty performing this task, especially with wily old school horses who know once they are caught they will have to go to work.



Photo courtesy of Dr. Peter Harris, PhD and Dr. Nelle Slack, PhD

The easiest way to catch a horse is to carry something edible with you: a few oats, a carrot, or peppermint can gain most horses' confidence. If the horse is smart, you will need to carry the treat and get close into the horse's neck while keeping the halter behind your back or low to the ground. Many old horses are smart enough to take your treat but not let you get near enough to them to get a rope or halter on them.



Photo courtesy of Dr. Peter Harris, PhD and Dr. Nelle Slack, PhD

As with everything with horses, the key is to take your time, give the treat to the horse, then move to the left side of her neck. Once close by the shoulder, just pet and stroke the horse's neck or scratch her withers. When you feel the horse is relaxed, go ahead and slip the rope around her neck.

Once you have the rope around the horse's neck, you can get up under the jaw of the horse, slide her nose into the noseband of the halter,

and slip the headpiece of the halter over the top of the head, then buckle the halter, and away you go. Never try to catch a horse by holding out the halter by the noseband and hoping she will put her nose in. Always get close into the horse before trying to buckle the halter.



Photo courtesy of Dr. Peter Harris, Phd and Dr. Nelle Slack, Phd

There are differing theories on buckling the halter as well. Some maintain that the end of the headpiece should always be tucked into

the buckle and it is sloppy and careless to leave it out. In most cases this is true, but again, use your own reasoning ability. If you have a horse that may panic in a given situation, you may want to leave the end of the headpiece out just so it would be easier to get the halter off. This would apply to the first time you tied a horse or put him in a trailer or other tight situation, or if you want a quick release when turning him out.



Photo courtesy of Dr. Peter Harris, PhD and Dr. Nelle Slack, PhD

This brings up another point: Try never to just yank the halter off your horse when you turn him out. Make him stand for a minute after you have undone the buckle. If you have a horse that bolts as soon as he hears the buckle come undone, start taking treats out with you and give a few to the horse as you take the halter off or just start walking into the field with the horse and letting him get a few bites of grass before you take off the halter. It will save a lot of training later because a horse that bolts off as soon as the halter is removed can be dangerous, running over the handler, or kicking out and catching you as they run off, not to mention dragging halter, rope, and handler with them when the buckle doesn't disengage all the way.

Once you've caught your horse, you will want to groom her before you saddle up. A good basic grooming kit contains a round rubber curry, a medium body brush, hoofpick, towel, and hairbrush. If your horse lives outside, you might want to add a metal curry to remove dried mud.



Photo courtesy of Dr. Peter Harris, Phd and Dr. Nelle Slack, Phd

Basically you want to start by using the rubber curry in circular motions all over the horse's body to loosen dirt and hair. Then take your body brush and brush firmly in the direction of the hair growth to remove the dirt and smooth the coat back down. You can also go over the horse with a towel or old burlap sack (if you can find such a thing) to help bring a shine to the horse's coat.



Photo courtesy of Dr. Peter Harris, Phd and Dr. Nelle Slack, Phd

It is a good idea to pick the horse's feet out when you finish riding, particularly if you have ridden in a rocky area. If your horse has black smelly goo in his foot, he has thrush. It is important to treat it with a topical application for thrush, including Kopertox, Thrush-X, or in a pinch, plain old Clorox.



Photo courtesy of Dr. Peter Harris, Phd and Dr. Nelle Slack, Phd

It is best to remember, too, that as the old adage goes, “All horses kick and all dogs bite.” So be sure when you are working around your horse and have to move behind him, you either stay very close to his hind legs or far enough away that a kick can't reach you. This will save you a lot of pain because if the horse should kick, it is when you are between 1 and 2 feet away from the hind legs that you get the full brunt of the kick. And I can tell you, that can hurt. Even the best horsemen at one time or another have had a nice imprint of a shoe on their person... somewhere.

CHAPTER FOUR – FINDING A TEACHER

Just as you want to look for a horse that suits your interest and personality, you must also look for a trainer or teacher who will do the same. Where you find your teacher will depend on your goals. If you want to show, then attending a horse show that highlights the discipline you are interested in is the best way to see and compare different teachers or trainers. If you are a would-be trail rider, look for groups and organizations that support those interests and find the available barns in your area.



Photo courtesy of Valerie Holder, Dr. Peter Harris, PhD and Dr. Nelle Slack, PhD

You can find a certified American Riding Instructors Association (ARIA) teacher by checking out the association's website at <http://riding-instructor.com/instructors/>. While this gives you some assurance that your teacher adheres to standards of safety and instruction, don't rule out someone who is not certified or licensed if they have good references. The horse business is not all about degrees and certification; hands' on experience should always be highly

valued.

The yellow pages are a good source and of course an online search will offer up a wide variety of barns from which to choose. Today many training barns have excellent websites that offer a comprehensive list of what services they offer—some even allow you to watch a lesson in progress online to help you determine if their style is for you. But don't confuse marketing with expertise. While websites and flyers attract your attention and make it easy for you to find the teacher, remember the strong suit of many excellent horse people is *not* marketing but working with animals—try to see beyond the presentation to find a teacher who is passionate about and good at what they do.



Photo courtesy of Dr. Peter Harris, Phd and Dr. Nelle Slack, Phd

A good way to go about this is to visit local tack stores and feed stores. Most have a bulletin board and generally the salespeople are a great resource that is often over-looked. Ask them who they would recommend—most people working in stores like this have been in the area for years and have seen many barns and trainers come and go. Listen to what they have to say and don't be dazzled by over-glowing reports or slightly negative ones. Get the names and go and see for

yourself if the situation suits you.

Take a look at the barn. It doesn't have to be a state of the art architectural structure but it should be clean and neat; halters hung up, aisle ways raked or swept. If the barn aisle is strewn with old loose hay and there is junk everywhere, it is a pretty good bet that that person won't have the organizational skills or attention to detail to be a good trainer or teacher. Glance inside the stalls Is the water dirty, is there a lot of manure, do the stalls smell? This can tell you a lot about how people really treat their animals.



Photo courtesy of Dr. Peter Harris, Phd and Dr. Nelle Slack, Phd

Don't mistake laziness for lack of staff. If a person works alone, they may not have time to stop and clean up after each horse is taken out to work. A barn can be slightly untidy during the work day when horses and riders are going in and out, but it should always **start out** and **end up** clean. If it doesn't, there are probably other short cuts being taken—horses not groomed or being ridden when they should be.

If you can, watch a lesson and also talk to some of the other students. If you are a shy person, don't get involved with a teacher who screams and berates no matter how "expert" they are. By the same token, if you are one who possibly needs a push to excel, don't sign up with the quiet introvert who will never take you out of your comfort zone.

Know your own needs and try to find a teacher who comes as close to meeting them as you can.

If you dream of being on the Olympic Dressage team but can only find a beginning teacher in your area, don't lose hope. Start with a GOOD beginning teacher and get a recommendation for a specialist later. Learning to ride takes many years and if you can ride with several different people, all the better as each has something unique to offer. But be sure that you are choosing teachers who will help you improve and not just gravitating to those who tell you what you want to hear.

Talk to the trainer/teacher about the programs they offer. It is best to start with at least three or four private lessons. Groups are great, both financially and for learning how to maneuver around other horses, but it is best to get the basics down before venturing into a large group.

Some trainers offer deals for buying a package of lessons by the month. If you are serious about learning, you should take at least two lessons a week for the first few months. If you can't do this financially, one lesson a week is the absolute minimum but you'll have to do a lot of strengthening work at home to make your lesson worthwhile. After you have mastered the basics (in your teacher's opinion—not yours) you may be able to ride horses in the barn outside of a lesson situation but you should always ride with an experienced person on site in case you run into trouble.



Photo courtesy of Dr. Peter Harris, PhD and Dr. Nelle Slack, PhD

Don't be surprised if you still have to pay to ride on your own or are asked to clean stalls or turn out horses in return for riding privileges. Because that is just what being able to ride while you are learning is—a privilege—not something anyone owes you no matter how much natural talent you may possess. It takes many years of riding different types of horses to learn to really ride.

Don't be in a hurry to be an expert; remember, “keep your eyes open

and your mouth shut.” Watch what others in the barn are doing and instead of just copying them, think about why they are doing it, try to analyze whether or not it is a smart and safe thing to do, and then formulate your own *silent* opinion. That is the beauty of horses—just when you think you know it all, they will do something you never saw before. It keeps it interesting.

CHAPTER FIVE – GETTING READY TO RIDE

Although your search for the best teacher may take some time, don't despair—you can use that time to get really prepared for your first lesson and keep you motivated while your search is progressing.

First get your riding gear together. You should have a pair of boots with a small heel that fit your feet. To start with, you don't have to have expensive custom or ready-made "riding boots".



Photo courtesy of Dr. Peter Harris, Phd and Dr. Nelle Slack, Phd

Ask people you know who ride if they know of anyone selling a pair of boots, look for used tack stores, check out craigslist or ebay. Not only can you find some good deals, but the boots will be broken in for you, a definite plus that can save time and blisters. The style of boot is one of personal taste but paddock boots are always a safe bet to start. Remember if you buy a pair of red topped cowboy boots and then decide to start out at a dressage barn, you may not only stand out like a sore thumb but be asked to buy another pair of more conservative footwear.



Photo courtesy of Dr. Peter Harris, PhD and Dr. Nelle Slack, PhD

Jeans are always a good bet to start riding, although many people feel the inside seams rub on their legs. When you are visiting the used tack store, take a look at the breeches or riding tights they may have available and check out the half chaps—all get for saving the legs. If you have long fingernails you may also want to invest in a good pair of gloves. Riding gloves need to be thin to allow a good feel on the reins. Keep that in mind. Don't try to use your old gardening gloves or thick work gloves, particularly when taking your first few lessons.

There are a few exercises you can do to help get yourself ready to ride or to keep your strength up and muscles stretched on the days you can't get to the barn. Pilates can be a great help if you don't already do it as part of your regular exercise regimen, try to sign up for a class that focuses on developing the core and inner thigh strength.



Photo courtesy of Dr. Peter Harris, Phd and Dr. Nelle Slack, Phd

You can strengthen your legs by doing squats aided by the back on a chair. Start with about 25 and work up to 50-100 repetitions at least three times a week.



Photo courtesy of Dr. Peter Harris, Phd and Dr. Nelle Slack, Phd

Or use the chair to sit backwards and practice your posting.



Photo courtesy of Dr. Peter Harris, PhD and Dr. Nelle Slack, PhD

Put a large book or two (or a small Pilates ball or even a ThighMaster if you can find one) between your knees. Squeeze it first 10, then 25, then 50 times, three times a week. Not very exciting, but it can really help build the muscles you will need to develop for effective leg aids.



Photo courtesy of Dr. Peter Harris, Phd and Dr. Nelle Slack, Phd

One very valuable exercise is to find a step and stretch the backs of your heels by balancing the ball of your foot on the step, pushing down into your heel and stretching it down as far as you can. Do this approximately 25-30 times three times a week or whenever you happen to have a step handy. This is a really good way to stretch your leg muscles and heels into the “riding mode”.

You can also help develop your “riding posture” by doing a simple

exercise that they used to ask Cavalry officers to do while they were on horseback. It is a little restricting when done on your horse but can be very helpful to get you “set” in the right way. Take a broomstick and place it behind your back. Hook your right elbow behind the stick with your forearm underneath it, do the same with your left arm.

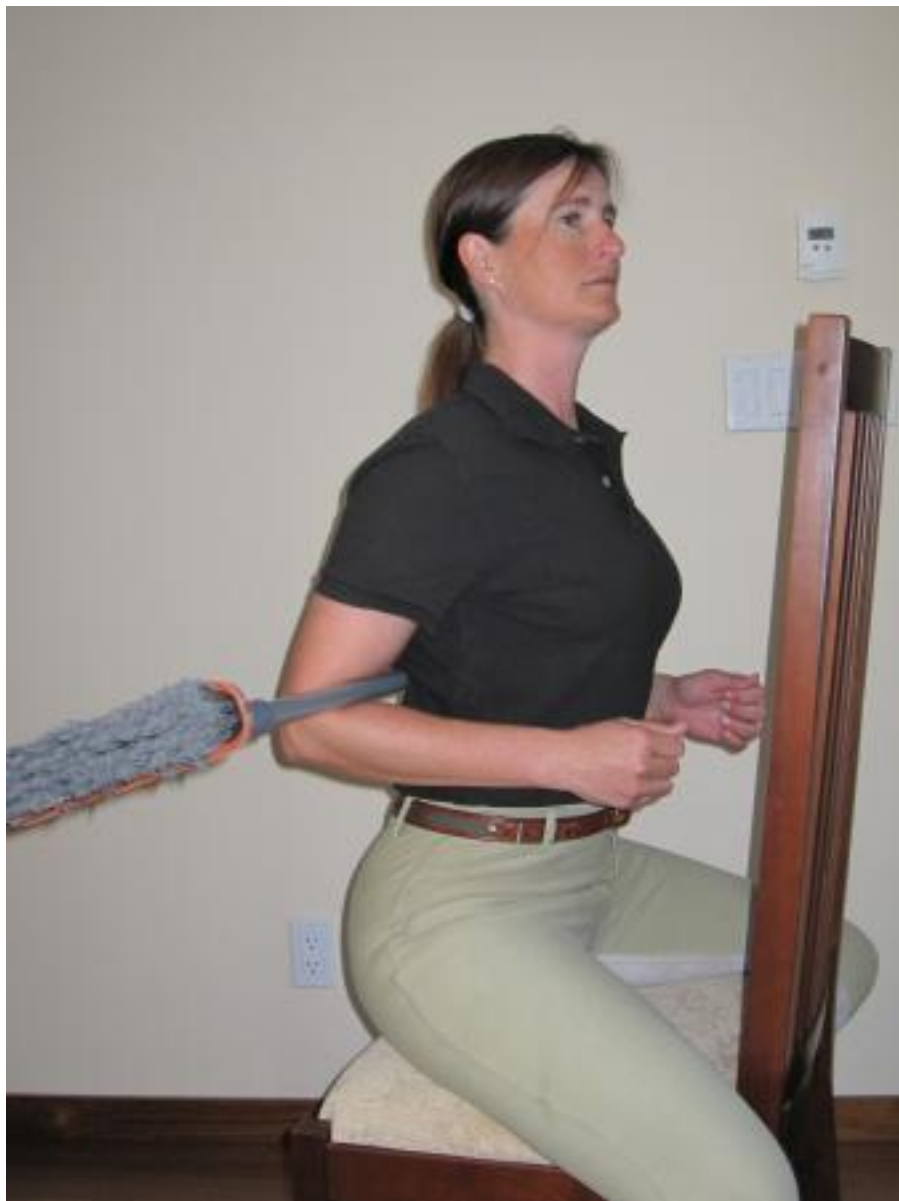


Photo courtesy of Dr. Peter Harris, Phd and Dr. Nelle Slack, Phd

Bring your hands in front of you and pretend you are holding the reins in your hands as you walk or sit. Be sure to allow plenty of room for

the stick if you walk around or you could cause more damage to your possessions than you help your posture.

All of this can be done while watching TV or listening to music, or you can put in a copy of *National Velvet* and pretend you are getting ready for the Grand National with Elizabeth Taylor and the Pie.

CHAPTER SIX – FIRST LESSON

The next three chapters will cover three ideal lessons to give you an idea of how you will progress. However, unless you are a very unusual student, it will take more than three lessons to progress at such a rapid rate. It can take months to reach a point where you will be able to canter without the aid of the longe line.

In the real world, you may repeat parts of the first lesson a few times and/or the second lesson and third lesson many times. Do not despair if you have trouble learning any part of the lesson—riding well takes many years of practice and it is often the best rider who has the hardest time in the beginning.

Teachers will each have their own way to get you started, but the following will give you a good idea of what to expect at your first lesson.

Even though in a previous chapter we covered catching and grooming the horse, most teachers will have the horse already caught when you come for your first lesson. They may ask you to groom the horse and then help saddle him.

As always when grooming, it is important to make sure that you have all the horse's hair smooth before you place a saddle on the horse's back. You should run your hand along the horse's back on each side, paying particular attention to the area of the barrel (the barrel is the middle of the horse's body) where the cinch or girth will fasten. When you are sure there are "no burrs under the saddle", move to the left hand side of the horse. You are now ready to "tack up".



Photo courtesy of Dr. Peter Harris, PhD and Dr. Nelle Slack, PhD

First, place the blanket or pad a little bit farther up the horse's neck than you want it to finally rest, then gently slide it toward the horse's tail until it rests naturally over the back of the withers. Then place your saddle on the pad, taking care that the girth or cinch and stirrups are out of the way and will not bang down on the horse's leg. Place—don't throw or drop—the saddle onto the horse's back: if you can't do this because of the weight of the saddle, get a lighter saddle. Put yourself in the horse's place. How would you like to have 50 pounds of noisy buckles and leather thrown at you on a daily basis?



Photo courtesy of Dr. Peter Harris, Phd and Dr. Nelle Slack, Phd

Once your saddle is in place, you will need to fasten the girth or cinch. English saddles generally have three short straps on the underside of the saddle called billets. The girth is usually attached to the first and third billet but may be adjusted due to a particular horse's body. Most Western saddles have a single buckle that the latigo is looped through several times and then fastened. Be sure to make the girth snug but don't over tighten it. Let the horse walk forward a few steps and then tighten it a bit more. Make sure to check it before you mount, but always walk the horse forward a few steps after you tighten the girth before you mount.



Photo courtesy of Dr. Peter Harris, Phd and Dr. Nelle Slack, Phd

Before you mount the horse, you will need to adjust your stirrups. A good rule of thumb is to place your hand at the top of the stirrup leather and pull the stirrup straight back toward your armpit. The bottom of the stirrup should fix snugly under your arm. You will probably have to make some minor adjustments once you are in the saddle but this method is a good way to find a fairly safe starting point.



Photo courtesy of Dr. Peter Harris, PhD and Dr. Nelle Slack, PhD

You will need to bridle the horse. Remember how you moved into the horse's neck to put on the halter? Bridling is very similar. For safety's sake, you should untie or take the horse out of the crossties, then unbuckle the halter and place it around the horse's neck. That way if he decides to leave before you have the bridle on, you have some control!



Photo courtesy of Dr. Peter Harris, Phd and Dr. Nelle Slack, Phd

Move into the horse's neck on the left hand (near) side. Hold the

bridle in your right hand so that the crownpiece is sticking up about 6 inches above your fist. Move that hand around the right side of the horse's head and place your hand on the bridge of his nose, with the bit hanging just below the horse's mouth. Take your left hand and slide your thumb in the horse's mouth at the very back of his lips (there are no teeth in this part of his mouth, which is called the "bars", so don't worry). He will open his mouth as you do this, and you should then gently slide the bridle up the front of his face while slipping the bit into his mouth. If he doesn't open his mouth, push down slightly onto the bars of his mouth with your thumb.



Photo courtesy of Dr. Peter Harris, PhD and Dr. Nelle Slack, PhD

Be very careful not to bang your horse's teeth with the bit as you bring the bit and bridle into place. When the bit is in the horse's mouth, slide his right ear under the crownpiece and then slide the left ear underneath the crownpiece. Check to see that the bit is adjusted properly.



Photo courtesy of Dr. Peter Harris, PhD and Dr. Nelle Slack, PhD

There should be one or two wrinkles at the edge of the horse's lips to provide a comfortable fit. Finally, fasten the throatlatch, making sure you can fit your fist between the horse's throat and the leather strap of the throatlatch to allow enough breathing room.



Photo courtesy of Dr. Peter Harris, PhD and Dr. Nelle Slack, PhD

Now you are ready to get in the saddle. The best way to mount a horse is from a mounting block. This is usually a small two or three step arrangement that provides a little extra height for the rider. It not only makes it easier to scale the heights of a tall horse but also pulls on the girth less as you get into the saddle, again making it a bit more pleasant for the horse.



Photo courtesy of Dr. Peter Harris, Phd and Dr. Nelle Slack, Phd

It is possible to mount from a fence, but most horses get wise to this and will move away at the final and crucial moment or, worse still, move into you and crush you between the fence and themselves. When mounting from a fence it is also possible to catch your foot or a stirrup in the fence and that can be dangerous.

To correctly mount, take the reins in your left hand in a bunch at the horse's withers. Take the stirrup in your right hand and turn toward the back of the horse. Put your left foot in the stirrup and your right hand on the saddle, take a few little bounces, push down on your left hand, and swing your right leg over the horse's rump. Sit down gently into the saddle and pick up your opposite stirrup.

If you don't have a mounting block, the same method will work from the ground but it will require more effort on your part to bounce enough to give yourself momentum and to pull yourself the rest of the

way up. You can also get a leg up from your teacher or a friend. This requires you to gather your reins, face directly into the side of the horse, and bend your left leg at the knee. The teacher will place her hands under your leg and at the count of three, boost you into the air and hopefully the saddle.

Now that you are in the saddle, what do you do?

There are many different ways or “seats” to adopt depending upon what you are trying to achieve. However, a good basic seat can be adjusted and adapted and that is what you should try to develop when you first begin. Try to sit comfortably in the saddle so that you can feel your seat bones and a little weight in your feet. Your knee should be bent with the stirrup leather under your knee approximately 2 to 3 inches as it hangs straight down to your foot. Your weight should be on the ball of your foot with the heel slightly lower than your toes and the toes forward not out to the side.



Photo courtesy of Dr. Peter Harris, Phd and Dr. Nelle Slack, Phd

It can be helpful to use a “necktie” on the horse to help you get the feel of the proper position without using the reins for balance. This is easily done by placing a leg wrap around the horse’s neck and tying it so you can reach it while seated, but also use it for balance when standing in the stirrups. Practice sitting and rolling onto your knees several times so you can get a good feel of your center on the horse. Leave the necktie in place as you learn to hold the reins and move through several different gaits; it will help you and save the horse’s mouth.



Photo courtesy of Dr. Peter Harris, Phd and Dr. Nelle Slack, Phd

The reins can be held in many different ways but most horsemen agree the rein should come from the horse's mouth and under the third or fourth finger of the hand. When you are first learning or if you have small hands, it is often easier to put your whole hand inside the reins making for smoother movement and more consistent contact.



Photo courtesy of Dr. Peter Harris, Phd and Dr. Nelle Slack, Phd

It is always a good idea to keep the horses on a longe line for the first lesson. This allows you to feel safe as you are learning to direct and “rate” (keep at a desired speed) the horse. This also allows the teacher to move the horse forward and stop him if you become unbalanced.



Photo courtesy of Dr. Peter Harris, PhD and Dr. Nelle Slack, PhD

To move the horse into a walk, ease your fingers open on the reins and feel your seat bones in the saddle and squeeze your legs into the horse's sides from the seat bone all the way down through your calf without turning your lower leg out or wrapping it around the horse. As the horse moves forward, release your leg slightly and make a little contact with your reins by closing your hand slightly while not pulling on the rein. Let yourself move with the horse while maintaining an erect posture and try to look up and through the horse's ears so that you are looking ahead at all times.

This means not fixing your eyes like a zombie but looking about 20-30 feet ahead. If you are doing a circle, for example, look around the bend of the circle with your eyes and your whole upper body, as if you also had eyes in your chest. This is important because it makes a subtle change in your weight that is very apparent to the horse.

As you are walking, put your index fingers around the necktie and practice rolling up and onto your knees. This is sometimes called a “two point” or balance position and helps to steady you and stretch your legs, and makes it easier for you to keep your heels down.



Photo courtesy of Dr. Peter Harris, Phd and Dr. Nelle Slack, Phd

Get the feel of the horse underneath you and try shifting your weight from foot to foot to see how it feels. Once you are comfortable moving around in the circle, ask the horse to stop. A good way to do this is to put your weight into your seat and push slightly down into your feet. Then gently and slowly close your hands on the reins bringing your elbows back until you feel heavy contact with the horse's mouth. Once the horse stops, open your fingers slightly and relax your weight. You might say "whoa" as you do this, but some disciplines frown on the use of voice commands so ask your teacher his or her preference. If you get your reins back so far they are in your stomach before you feel any contact, your reins are too long.



Photo courtesy of Dr. Peter Harris, PhD and Dr. Nelle Slack, PhD

Always try to end the lesson on a good note, reviewing in your mind the way everything feels. Riding is mostly being able to translate how you feel on the horse into what you want to accomplish. Focus on feel because the details can be overwhelming at first (and for many years after if you let them!). Repeat some of your pre-lesson exercises at home between lessons—sitting backwards on a chair to practice your posting or stretching your heels down on a step. Such exercises will help you with both strengthening and positioning by creating good muscle memory.



Photo courtesy of Dr. Peter Harris, PhD and Dr. Nelle Slack, PhD

To dismount , put the reins in your left hand as you did when mounting and place that hand on your horses neck. Stand up in the stirrups and slowly kick your right foot out of the stirrup. Put your weight on your left hand and left foot and bring your right leg over the horse's rump. Put your right hand in the middle of the saddle and while pushing down on your hands, kick your left foot out of the stirrup and drop to the ground. Your legs will be tired so be sure you are ready for that and don't let yourself collapse in a heap.

We'll cover unsaddling in Lesson Two.

CHAPTER SEVEN – LESSON TWO

Before you start your second lesson, it is a good idea to review everything you learned in the first session. Did you brush your horse correctly, position the saddle blanket where it belongs, and tighten the girth slowly?

Remember to check the stirrup leather length before you mount and adjust them accordingly. If you use the same saddle for each lesson, try to remember the hole number on the stirrup leathers that worked for you and put the stirrups there before you tighten the girth for the last time. Before you take the horse's halter off and put it around his neck, go over in your mind how you held the bridle and the best way to slip it over your horse's head. Then go ahead and bridle your horse remembering to check for a good fit by looking for the two wrinkles in his lips and leaving the throatlatch loose enough for him to breathe.

Once you are mounted, try to get yourself back into that comfortable position with your seat bones deep in the saddle and contact running down your leg. Now you are ready to head out on the longe line and try to get the horse to the outside of the longe circle without the help of your teacher. Start the squeeze of your legs from the seat bones all the way through your calves. You may also try using your voice in the form of a cluck (moving your tongue quickly from top to bottom) to get your horse moving.



Once you're on the rail or on the end of the longe line and walking in a circle, hook your index fingers over the "necktie" and when your teacher asks you to roll onto your knees, see how long you can stay in that position then lower slowly into the saddle. Try rising and sitting to a set beat in your head: up-down, up- down, up-down—this will help you adapt to the rhythm of the trot later on.

Gradually try to use the necktie less and your knees and thighs more to come out of the saddle. Don't overdo it, you don't have to eject yourself or as one teacher said, "You are not supposed to look like toast coming up out of a toaster." Just create a little air between you and the seat of the saddle.



Photo courtesy of Dr. Peter Harris, PhD and Dr. Nelle Slack, PhD

If the horse you are riding will allow it, place the buckle of the reins on his withers* and hold your arms straight out to the side as you turn the circle, and look with your eyes and follow with your chest and arms, making the turn flow around the curve instead of a flat-sided octagon.

When you feel balanced in the saddle, kick one foot out of the stirrup and pick the stirrup up again without looking (be careful not to kick the horse as you do this). Then kick both feet out and pick up both stirrups. The easiest way to pick up your stirrup is to turn your toe

inward and feel for the inside of the stirrup bar, push your foot in, and give it a little kick to the outside as you feel the inside bar of the side of the stirrup next to your big toe.

You may now be ready to try trotting (don't worry if you are not comfortable enough to trot yet—many very good riders take a long time to get the basics down). If you are ready to trot, your teacher will have you take hold of the necktie and ease the horse into a trot. At first it will feel as if you have been sent over Niagara Falls in a barrel or you are strapped inside a cement mixer. But don't worry—it gets better.

If you can, just let yourself move slightly from side to side as the horse trots slowly around the circle. If you have a gaited horse, you'll find the ride to be much smoother and you will just need to concentrate on letting yourself move with your horse while maintaining your own posture. Riding is much like dancing: You have to develop a sense of common rhythm without losing your own sense of self. Each partner has to blend without invading the other's space.



Photo courtesy of Dr. Peter Harris, Phd and Dr. Nelle Slack, Phd

To continue at the trot, it is handy (even for Western riders) to know how to post. Try doing this by first getting your up-down rhythm in your head. Then ask the horse to trot by squeezing your legs in the same way you did to ask him to move forward at the walk. Your teacher will help you from the center of the circle. Try to match the

horse's diagonal leg movement to your up-down rhythm. This can take a while to see so for your first few rounds don't worry about it; just keep going. Use your necktie to help you balance while keeping the rhythm in your head going. If you don't get it after a few circles, take a walking break then try again.

Learning to post can be the most difficult part of riding basics to master so just hang in there. Get that rhythm and then the teacher will begin to talk about the correct and incorrect diagonal. There is a never ending series of skills to achieve, so revel in your little victories and look forward to the next challenge. Riding well has very little to do with just winning ribbons; it takes years to master and really is like the words of Thomas Edison: "99% perspiration and 1% inspiration."

After all that posting or attempted posting you will be fairly tired but you will still need to untack your horse and put him away properly. Dismount (see Lesson One). And lead your horse to the crosstie or tie rack.



Photo courtesy of Dr. Peter Harris, PhD and Dr. Nelle Slack, PhD

Undo the throatlatch buckle and reach under his head as you did when putting on the bridle. Place your right hand on the bridge of the horse's nose and with your left hand, slip the crown piece first over the right then the left ear. Let the bit slip from the horse's mouth, taking care that it doesn't bang his teeth.

Put the halter on and hang your bridle up—never throw any item of tack on the ground. When your horse is tied securely, take the left

stirrup and run it up the leather, then run the right stirrup up, if you are riding English.



You are now ready to undo the girth. If you are using an English saddle, pull the end of the billets up toward the horse's withers and

unhook the buckles.

If you are riding Western, hook the left stirrup onto the saddle horn. Then unbuckle the cinch using an upward pull to release the buckle tongue.



Photo courtesy of Dr. Peter Harris, PhD and Dr. Nelle Slack, PhD

Before you pull the saddle off, make sure the girth or cinch is over the top of the saddle or fastened to the offside just as you did when

saddling to make sure it doesn't bang the horse's legs as you remove it. If your saddle is heavy and you are small, you may want to remove it from the off side (right) but make sure your horse is used to this as some people never saddle or unsaddle from this side.

Once the saddle is removed, brush the horse thoroughly and check for any rub marks. If the weather is warm, you may want to hose the horse off—ask the teacher what he or she prefers. When the horse is clean and dry and your tack put away, your lesson is over.

CHAPTER EIGHT – LESSON THREE

Before you take your third lesson it is probably a good idea to bring up the idea of visualization with your teacher. Visualization means much more than seeing yourself accepting the trophy at the Olympics—although there is nothing wrong with lofty goals.

Visualization can help speed the learning process. There are many good books out there about visualization, but basically what you want to do is set a goal, then see yourself achieve that goal. This can be as simple as getting your horse to walk a straight diagonal line from one corner of the arena to the opposite corner, or as complicated as achieving a winning ride in a high level horse show.



Photo courtesy of Dr. Peter Harris, Phd and Dr. Nelle Slack, Phd

Start by sitting in a quiet place and seeing yourself start to do what you want to do. Imagine a perfect ride. It sounds simple but inevitably you will hit a snag in your vision. Your horse may refuse to move off the rail to make that diagonal line. Don't keep going with a disastrous performance; stop your film and begin again truly knowing that you will be able to have the ride you want. It may take several attempts to get that movie to run in your head the way you want it to, but just keep stopping it at a mistake and going back to the beginning until you get a perfect result. Sounds crazy but try it—it works.

Now you can head into your third lesson prepared with the visualization of you perfectly posting around the arena, making the turns using your eyes and your body, and squeezing all the way down through your leg to provide your horse with the momentum he needs. You may even feel confident enough to take off the longe line.

If you and your teacher agree that you can work off the longe line, go ahead and head to the rail. Pick up your posting trot and get that rhythm. Once you are solidly posting around the rail, take a look down at your horse's shoulders. You will see that you are moving up and down with one of his front legs—this is called posting the diagonal. It is considered correct to post the “outside” diagonal, meaning you go up when the horse's front leg closest to the rail reaches forward.

Each person finds the best way to tell which diagonal they are posting. Some like to feel the hoof hit the ground and their bottom hit the saddle; others like to see the knee of the leg bending as they are out of the saddle. Either way is correct. It is faster if you look at the rail leg because if you come up and there is no knee there, you know you are on the wrong diagonal. But at first you may need to look at both legs to be sure of what you are seeing.

Posting the Right Diagonal



Photo courtesy of Dr. Peter Harris, PhD and Dr. Nelle Slack, PhD

Posting the Left Diagonal



Photo courtesy of Dr. Peter Harris, Phd and Dr. Nelle Slack, Phd

Once you can see your diagonal, then you should try to feel it, but that can take some time and practice. It is an important factor particularly if you want to show, but try to keep it in perspective as

you practice other aspects of riding. Also be aware that some horses, like some people, are right or left handed and tend to push you onto one diagonal or the other. This is one good reason to ride different horses as you are learning the different way each one feels.

The most important thing to learn once you are off the longe line is how to get where you want to go and stop when you want to stop. You are already aware of the need to look ahead about 20 to 30 feet, but now it will become even more important. Remember to start by using your eyes but look with your whole body (remember to use the “eyes” in your chest too). This will help to put your outside leg onto the horse’s side as you want to turn and allow the horse to bend around your inside leg. It will also position your hands so that your inside hand comes slightly back toward you while your outside hand moves slightly forward but remains steady. All this will happen naturally when you look with your body as well as your eyes.



Photo courtesy of Dr. Peter Harris, Phd and Dr. Nelle Slack, Phd

Remember to use your body to stop the horse as well. Push slightly down (not forward) into your feet, close your hands on the reins, and your body into the saddle. Say “whoa” and bring your hands back slightly to feel a heavier contact with the horse’s mouth, always taking just a slight bit more hold with one rein or the other so you don’t pull straight back on the horse’s mouth. Just make sure you alternate the rein you use more tension on so that you don’t cause your horse to develop one side of his mouth that is harder than the other.



Photo courtesy of Dr. Peter Harris, Phd and Dr. Nelle Slack, Phd

This brings up another point. You may find that most horses are stronger on the right side of their mouths and need more leg on the right. This is not because horses tend to be right-handed but rather because people tend to be right-handed. Work to ensure that you use both hands and legs equally. It is not always easy and most good riders will admit that even after years of work, it is still something they think about at the start of every ride.

If you are really dominant on one side, start doing all your everyday chores with your weaker hand to even out your strength: Pick up your cup with the left or feed the dog by scooping the food with your right. It will be awkward but it will help your riding.

Back to the lesson: Be sure to give your horse plenty of breathing time at the walk between trotting and cantering work. In a lesson situation, the teacher will be setting the pace but when you start to ride on your own it is important to remember that you aren't the only one working here. Be sure to vary the kinds of work you do. Even if you feel you need lots of work on making a perfect circle, let your horse take a break, stretch his neck, walk, or do some straight line work. It is easy to make a horse sour and put him off work, and it is not so simple to bring him back to the point where he looks forward to work again.

CHAPTER NINE – BEYOND THE THIRD LESSON

By the time you have finished your third lesson, if you have been strengthening and doing exercises at home, you should be feeling fairly comfortable on the horse. You may still need more practice trotting and not have your diagonals down pat, but moving forward at the walk, stopping, and moving into the trot should be fairly familiar to you.

As you move off of the longe line, it is very important to practice being able to put the horse where you want to go. An effective rider is the engineer and navigator who sets the speed and destination; try to avoid merely being a passenger on a runaway train.

Practice making circles of various sizes and become aware of the horse flowing around the circle in a series of archs. Once you can do that smoothly, start making a figure eight by putting two circles together and changing direction as you cross the middle where the two connect. Remember to change your diagonal as you change direction.

The easiest way to change your diagonal is to sit for two bounces and come up with the horse's other knee. This will take some practice and you may find you feel that you only sit for one bounce or that you need to sit for three; the fewer the better, but you should be able to feel the difference as you change from side to side. All of this takes time. You will not be able to do this with any degree of expertise in three lessons; three months perhaps, but it can take longer than that—it takes perseverance.

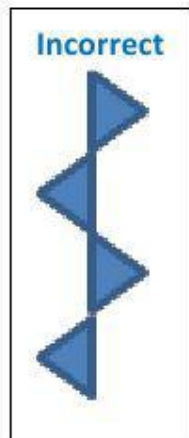
Again, a good way to practice your diagonals if you can only ride once a week is by either sitting backward on the chair and posting first with one imaginary front leg and then the other. You can also walk or jog the circles yourself on foot while holding up the hand on the outside of the circle, changing hands as you go through the circle's center.

This could also be a good time to practice making those circles uniform by dividing them into quarters; a good size for most people is 16 strides per quarter circle. When you are back on your horse, you'll probably find he is more comfortable with a 24 to 32 stride circle that fits 6 to 8 strides in each quarter. Try making the circle bigger and smaller as you practice. Use your legs to push the horse into or away from the center and use your hands to slow and shorten his stride by

closing your fingers on the reins and then opening them slightly to enlarge the circumference of the circle.

Once you feel comfortable changing directions in the figure eight (and remember to give the poor horse a break; five or six in a row is more than enough), take a few trotting or walking turns around the arena before you go back to figure work again. You can move onto a serpentine.

A serpentine is a series of half circles that alternate direction. A four loop serpentine will look like two “Ss”, one on top of the other. Try to imagine a line running through the middle of each S so that the changes of diagonal are made at right angles to the line. Many times you will see this done as if the rider was creating four triangles across the line. That is not the goal; you are attempting to make four flowing arches crossing the line, so that your horse moves around your inside leg without moving through your outside leg.



When you can accurately execute a circle, a figure eight, and a serpentine, and can stop relatively close to the place where you want to stop (within three feet), you are probably ready to move on to group lessons. This is definitely a decision your teacher should make, particularly if the teacher believes you need more practice before other riders are exposed to you! But don't hesitate to express your feelings; if you are not comfortable riding with others, wait a little longer or see if you can take a semi-private lesson.

Riding with just one other person can really help you progress because you can see another person at your level trying to do things you are trying to do. That person may have an idea that makes it easier for her that can work for you, too, and you will pick it up just by watching her

(and vice versa). Remember that old adage, “Keep your eyes open and your mouth shut.” Also, you can get a little break to rest while the other horse and rider team are doing individual work and you will have the advantage of learning to move around them or space yourself around the arena by circling away from them when you are working at the same time on the rail.

Throwing a group of inexperienced riders together in a lesson is like throwing someone in at the deep end of a pool to teach him to swim. It works for some, but it can be disastrous for others. In the best case scenario, you all learn to maneuver around each other and increase your skills. In the worst, you waste your precious lesson money for what amounts to little more than a bumper car ride.

Once you have learned to sit and post the trot and you are able to steer with some accuracy, you are probably ready to canter if you are riding English or lope if you are riding Western. Cantering is generally easier for most people than trotting because the horse is moving in a wave-like motion that allows you to follow him by relaxing your back and going with the flow. You do not post the canter but if you tighten your body, it can be just as rough as a trot, which is uncomfortable for rider and horse alike.

To begin cantering, you should go back to the longe line so you can concentrate on proper body and leg position. Take a hold of the necktie. Try to imagine this necktie as the reins, and take an easy hold, not a death grip. Now position yourself in the saddle so you can feel your seat bones with your tailbone tucked just slightly underneath you. Don’t over-round your back; do lift your ribs (remember that broomstick) and look through the horse’s ears as if you were proud to be here as my father, a long-time horse trainer and riding instructor, would say.

Remember, the canter is different from the trot. You will feel a rolling motion just as if you were sitting in a little boat and being rocked by the sea. Let your body follow this motion, don’t try to keep up with it or to create the motion, just let it carry you. You want to stay relaxed but not too relaxed; you want to be made of rubber, not Jell-O. Drop your rail leg back slightly, turn the heel into the horse’s side, and squeeze—off you go.

Just as in the trot there are right and left diagonals, in the canter there are right and left leads. The difference is that in the canter, the horse moves both legs on the same side together. A horse is said to be on the “correct lead” when the leg on the inside of the circle is reaching farther forward than the leg on the outside of the circle.

Left Lead



Photo courtesy of Dr. Peter Harris, Phd and Dr. Nelle Slack, Phd

Right Lead



Photo courtesy of Dr. Peter Harris, PhD and Dr. Nelle Slack, PhD

If the outside lead is used, the horse is said to be “counter-cantering” or to be on the false lead. If the horse is leading with one lead in front and the opposite leg behind, it is said to be cross cantering or, like one of my favorite but not often used expressions these days, disunited. While in higher training levels a rider may ask for a counter canter or a circle on a false lead to demonstrate a high level of balance, a cross canter is never a good goal. If your horse does cross canter, you will usually feel it; the ride will suddenly become very rough.

Whatever discipline you decide upon, there are a few things you can strive to do that will help improve your seat, hands, and general riding ability. For many years it was considered desirable for everyone to learn to ride bareback (without a saddle). I never agreed with this unless you also rode without a bridle, as most often the only thing riding without a saddle taught a student was how to balance on the horse’s mouth.

It can be very beneficial to learn to ride without stirrups, but it is best to do this at first with the aid of the necktie, as the same temptation exists if you only exchange your stirrups for the reins as a means to balance you in the saddle—it will not be much help in improving your

riding. But done properly, when you keep the leg in the exact correct position it should be in when you have a stirrup, it is a great way to build not only better balance but leg strength as well.



Photo courtesy of Dr. Peter Harris, Phd and Dr. Nelle Slack, Phd

It is best to cross the stirrups over the saddle if you intend to do a lot of trotting without stirrups because they frequently start swinging back and forth and can bang the horse in the elbow, frighten him into bolting, or he can misinterpret the touch of the empty stirrup as a signal to go faster or change gait.



Photo courtesy of Dr. Peter Harris, Phd and Dr. Nelle Slack, Phd

If you have a horse that won't take advantage of the situation, another good way to become one with your horse is to ride without reins. The best way to do this is to knot the reins on the horse's neck, then hover your hands over them and start moving your horse with your legs and body weight. You can occasionally just touch the reins if you need a little extra help.

CHAPTER TEN – LOOKING INTO YOUR RIDING FUTURE

When you have reached the point where you feel comfortable on a horse and your teacher feels that you can function without direct supervision, it may be time to reassess where you want to go with your riding. Many people are happy riding once or twice a week and can continue taking lessons or going on the occasional “hack” or trail ride without feeling the need for anything more. That is great.

There are others who want and often *need* to ride more often or form a closer bond with the horse that they ride than a weekly lesson will allow. If you intend to compete, you should plan on riding at least three times a week and doing other exercises between lessons to keep your muscle memory alive. Also, for most disciplines it is necessary for the horse to be worked at least five days a week.

One good formula is to ride three days on, one day off. This allows you to warm up and possibly introduce something new to your horse on the first day, review it on the second, and repeat it on the third. If you give your horse a day off, he will come back fresh and ready to learn something else or a new twist on what you have already taught him when he is back at work. For most people with full time work schedules, this may not be possible and you may have to settle for an every other evening schedule or a weekend and Wednesday riding schedule with bitting or longing in between.

Each horse is different and your horse may not need schooling as much as he just needs muscling or, in horse parlance, “legging up”. Remember, too, that horses also need down time. It is important to let horses have a space where they can relax even if they can’t have regular turnouts.

If you are one of those people who needs to ride more than once a week, eventually you will have thoughts of purchasing your own horse. This is a big step and should not be taken lightly. It is often best to lease or half-lease a horse—sometimes called “sponsoring”—and it means you bear all the costs or half of all the costs of maintaining a horse and have riding privileges appropriate to your amount of support. It is a great way to see if ownership is the way to go for you.

BUYING A HORSE

If you decide you must own your own horse, take a few things into consideration first.

You'll need to have a complete understanding of what you will spend, both up front, and on a month-to-month basis. Horses are not inexpensive. If you cannot commit to the expense of caring for a horse long term, don't do it. Horses aren't cars or bicycles; you can't put them in the garage and forget them. They are living beings and they need attention and proper care. The importance of taking a realistic look at the costs of horse ownership cannot be overemphasized. Many horse people say the expense of a horse is not in the purchase price, it's in the monthly care and upkeep.

A good way to get an accurate idea of expenses is by talking to several people who have owned horses. They will be able to give you a good picture of typical monthly expenses you can honestly expect. What will you need to purchase? Grooming tools, a saddle, bridle, halter, and leadrope? How will you transport your horse and where will she live? It is best to carefully itemize the costs for boarding, feeding, farrier services, and vet bills before you buy.

Don't forget to include the cost of additional lessons in your estimate. It will be important to have expert guidance as you and your new partner start to form a team. And in the long run, it will save you many dollars and hours of frustration by preventing the creation of bad habits and serious training problems.

If you have a small barn behind your house and a field where the horse can graze, don't assume all your expenses are covered. Having your own acreage is always helpful. But if you live in a suburban setting, make sure your zoning laws allow for horsekeeping. The presence of a barn is NOT a guarantee you can keep animals in it. Be aware it takes a lot of grass to support a horse; you will need to purchase supplemental feed and perhaps budget for someone to maintain fences and stalls if you don't have the time or inclination for these chores.

Also when you keep a horse at home, remember they don't take holidays and will need to be fed and watered and their stables cleaned even on holidays or when you want to stay in town for dinner or take that cruise in the Caribbean. Finding an affordable, reliable, knowledgeable person to do this can be difficult.

Don't make the mistake of not considering an older horse because you want a horse to love and ride for years and years. Older horses are

perfect for beginners. Most horsemen recommend horses at least ten years old as a first horse. Today's horses are better cared for than those of previous generations and it is now quite common for horses to be ridden into their late twenties and even early thirties. Older horses are often gentler, easier to handle—perfect for increasing your confidence as a rider/owner. This is especially important if you are buying a horse for children. Young children and young horses don't mix, it is usually a recipe for one or the other to get hurt.

When you set out on your search, take someone with extensive horse experience with you, preferably someone you already have a relationship with and trust—such as your riding teacher or local trainer. Ask this person to evaluate the horse, its suitability for you, and also the seller's motives. Ask why the person is selling the horse. If the owner doesn't give you straight answer, consider it a red flag. Everyone should be honest and forthcoming regarding a horse's health and mental attitude. But horse traders are horse traders... and they have been known to medicate a horse to mask lameness or other health problems, and to just plain lie to make a sale.

Impulse buying is never a good idea. Go look at a horse that you are interested in, go home, and think about it. Talk it over with your teacher, trainer, or advisor—and **listen** to what he tells you. If you are unsure, go back awhile later, ride the horse again, think it over again. A good seller wants to make sure the horse finds a good home. Most sellers will work with you to a point, but generally more than two try outs can look like you're just taking pony rides.

If possible, consider a "trial period" to make sure you and the horse are a good fit. Many sellers are open to this option, but there are also many good reasons for a seller to be reluctant. If they don't know you or your teacher, they may be concerned that their horse may be abused, neglected, or that many years of training will be ruined.

Above all, don't be tempted by "free". There are plenty of great horses out there that cost little and deserve good homes. But apply the same selection criteria to these horses as those with expensive price tags: If the horse isn't a good fit for you, don't take her home. As mentioned above, "The purchase price is the least expensive part of horses."

There are many variables when you deal with horses and many different ways to do things. Try to keep an open mind, watch, learn and practice, and you will have many years of interest, fun, and frustration to look forward to!



GLOSSARY

Action – the way a horse moves its legs generally referring to the amount of bend in the knee or hock. A horse is said to “go level” when the forearm is parallel to the ground.

Aged – more than 12 years old.

Aids – the use of hands, legs, seat, weight, and voice to influence a horse are considered natural aids. Whips and spurs are artificial aids.

Appaloosa – a spotted horse breed originating in the land of the Nez Perce Indians. Appaloosas have small spots on an opposing color “blanket”.

Arabian – the oldest pure breed of horse, originating in the Arabian Desert. Noted for finely chiseled heads.

Barrel Racing – a timed event in which the Western horse and rider pair gallop in a cloverleaf pattern around barrels.

Barn Sour – a dislike of leaving the company of other horses, or of leaving the stable.

Bars – the toothless gap between incisors and molars where the bit rests in a horse’s mouth.

Billets – leather straps under the flaps of English saddles, to which the buckles of the girth attach.

Bit — metal mouthpiece of a bridle.

Blaze – a wide swath of white on a horse’s face, running from above the eyes to the nostrils.

Blemish – a scar or defect, usually caused by injury or disease, that doesn’t affect serviceability.

Bosal – the noseband of a hackamore (usually made of braided rawhide pencil size to 1 ¼ inches in diameter).

Bran Mash — a warm meal made of wheat bran, warm water, and a little sweet feed concentrate and chopped apples or carrots.

Breeches – knee-length, fitted riding pants worn with tall English boots.

Breed Show – a show in which competition is limited to a single breed of horse; sanctioned by that breed's registry.

Broke – trained; a “dead broke” horse is very well-trained.

Canter – the gait between trot and gallop; it consists of three beats followed by a moment of suspension, and has “leads” in which legs on one side of the horse, front and back, reach farther forward than the legs on the other side.

Chaps – leather or suede leggings worn over jeans or riding pants and buckled around the waist. Standard Western show attire; also worn informally by English riders. Half chaps zip or buckle over the lower leg.

Cinch – the leather or fabric band that secures a Western saddle to the horse. Some Western saddles have a back cinch, which is not pulled tight. (The English equivalent of a cinch is a girth.)

Cloverleaf – the three-barrel pattern that barrel racers run.

Coggins Test – a blood test to detect exposure to equine infectious anemia; a “negative Coggins” is often required before a horse is allowed on the grounds of a horse show or a boarding stable.

Colic – pain in a horse's abdomen, ranging from mild to life-threateningly severe.

Combination – a set of two or three (double or triple) vertical jumps set on a course as one obstacle.

Competitive Trail Riding – a sport in which English or Western riders negotiate a preset trail and are judged on horsemanship and the fitness of their mounts, rather than speed.

Conformation – the physical structure and build of a horse.

Crest – the top of a horse's neck, from which the mane grows.

Cross Country Jumping – riding over a course of fences and obstacles constructed over natural terrain.

Croup – part of the hindquarters from the highest point to the top of the tail.

Curb Bit – a bit that uses sidepieces (“shanks”) and a strap or chain under the chin to create leverage on the bars of the mouth.

Cutting – a judged event in which the Western horse and rider pair must separate one calf from a herd and keep it from returning to the herd.

Diagonal – a pair of legs moving in unison at the trot (e.g., right front, left hind). A correctly posting rider (said to be “on the correct diagonal”) rises and sits in rhythm with the outside front leg.

Dressage – a French term meaning training. In the discipline of Dressage with a capital “D”, the horse and rider pair execute gymnastic movements demonstrating the horse’s balance, suppleness, cadence, and obedience.

Endurance Riding – contests judged for speed and fitness of the horse over 25, 50, and 100 miles.

Equitation – the art of riding. Equitation classes are judged on the rider’s correctness of form, proper use of aids, and control over the horse.

Eventing – a sport, also called combined training, in which English horse and rider pairs compete in Dressage, cross country jumping, and show jumping.

Even Way of Going – smooth, even, rhythmic movements at all require gaits.

Farrier – a person who trims and shoes horses’ feet.

Fiador — knotted rope throatlatch.

Fetlock – the wide part of the joint just above the hoof that seems like the equivalent of a human’s ankle.

Flank – the area of a horse’s side between his rib cage and hindquarters.

Forehand – a horse’s head, neck, shoulders, and front legs.

Frame – the position of the horse’s body as if seen in a picture frame.

Frog – the dense, shock-absorbing, triangular growth on the underside of the hoof.

Founder – a serious disease affecting the hooves; also called laminitis.

Gaits — the different ways in which a horse travels, including walk, trot, canter, and gallop. So-called “gaited horses” have specialty gaits, such as the rack, running walk, and the pace.

Gaited Horse – one possessing a gait beyond the natural walk, trot, and canter; gaited breeds include the American Saddlebred, Icelandic, Missouri Fox Trotter, Paso Fino, Peruvian Paso, and Tennessee Walking Horse.

Gallop – the fastest gait; it consists of four beats followed by a moment of suspension.

Garters – leather straps that buckle under a rider’s knee to keep jodhpur pants from riding up.

Gelding – a castrated male horse.

Girth – the leather or fabric band that secures an English saddle to the horse. (The Western equivalent is a cinch.)

Grade Horse – one not registered with a breed association.

Green – inexperienced; may be applied to a horse of any age having limited training, or a rider.

Ground Training – schooling of the horse from the ground, rather than from the saddle. Includes in hand work, long lining, and longeing.

Gymkhana – competitions offering timed obstacle classes and games such as barrel racing and pole bending.

Hackamore – A bridle featuring a nosepiece, instead of a bit, to control the horse. Americanization of Jaquima, Spanish for the combination of bosal, fiador, headstall, and mecate.

Halter – the headgear with which a horse is led; made of leather, synthetic webbing, or rope.

Halter Class – an event in which horses are led and judged on the basis of their conformation.

Hand – the unit of measurement for determining the height of horses and ponies. One hand equals four inches; a 14.3-hand horse is 59 inches tall from his withers to the ground.

Headset – the position of the horse's head and neck while being ridden.

Headstall – part of the bridle used to hold the bit or hackamore.

Hock – the large, angular joint halfway up a horse's hind leg.

Horn – the part of a Western saddle that extends up from the front used for securing a rope.

Hunter Class – a judged class in which the English horse and rider pair must negotiate a course of fences with willingness, regularity, and style.

In Hand – leading a horse.

Jodhpurs – ankle-length, fitted English riding pants worn with ankle-high jodhpur boots. This ensemble is popular among young riders.

Jog – a slow trot performed by Western horses.

Jog-back - the in hand evaluation for soundness in hunter classes at some large shows.

Jumper Class – a class in which the English horse and rider pair must negotiate a course of fences; only knock-downs and time penalties count.

Kimberwicke – an English bit that combines snaffle rings with a mild curb bit action.

Laminitis – a serious disease affecting the hooves. Also called founder.

Lead – a pattern of footfalls at the canter in which the legs on one side of the horse, front and back, reach farther forward than the legs on the other side. In a circle to the right, the right (inside) legs should lead, and vice versa.

Lead-line Class – a class for the youngest children in which all mounts are lead by an adult or older child.

Leg Up – a boost into the saddle, given by someone standing next to the rider .

Loafing Shed – a three-sided shelter in a pasture or paddock.

Longe – to work a horse on a long line (30 feet or more) in a circle around you (also called gypping).

Lope – a slow, longer-strided canter performed by Western horses.

Mare – a female horse four years of age or older.

Markings —white areas on a horse's face and/or legs; commonly used to identify individual animals.

Martingale – a piece of equipment designed to effect a horse's head carriage or to steady a rider's hands. Made in a v-shape to divide around the front of the horse's neck with rings on each end for the reins.

Mecate – a horsehair rope used as reins on a hackamore.

Medal Class – an equitation class in which a medal is awarded to the winner.

Morgan – a breed descending from one prepotent sire, Justin Morgan of Vermont.

Mouth, hard or soft – describes the horse's relative responsiveness to the bit.

Mucking Out — removing manure and soiled bedding from a stall or pen.

Near Side – the left side of the horse.

On the Forehand — A horse that is not carrying enough weight on its hindquarters.

Off Side – the right side of the horse.

Paddock – a small pasture or enclosure.

Paint Horse – a horse, usually of stock type, registered with the American Paint Horse Association; it has a two-toned body color (white patches and areas over the base color).

Pastern – the part of the horse's leg between the hoof and the fetlock.

Pelham – a one-piece English bit equipped to handle four reins.

Pen – an outdoor enclosure large enough for a horse to walk around

in.

Pinto/pinto – A horse or pony of varying type, with a two-toned body color (generally large blocks of white), registered with the Pinto Horse Association of America, Inc. A pinto (lowercase) is any horse or pony with a two-toned coat.

Playday – an informal competition featuring speed events and games, such as pole bending and trotting race.

Pleasure – a judged event in which the horse's smoothness, manner of going, and obedience are judged.

Pole Bending — a timed event in which contestants must weave in and out a line of poles.

Poll – the bony bump between a horse's ears.

Pommel – the front, top part of a saddle.

Pony – any equine that measures less than 14.2 hands (58 inches) from its withers to the ground. Pony classes at hunter/jumper shows may be divided into small (under 12.2), medium (under 13.2), and large (under 14.2).

Pony of the Americas (POA) – a pony breed created by crossing Shetland ponies with Appaloosa horses; generally with Appaloosa coat patterns.

Posting – rising and sitting in the saddle at the trot, in rhythm with the horse's strides.

Pre-purchase Exam – the process of having a veterinarian check your prospective horse or pony for health and soundness; also called a "vet check" or "vetting".

Pulling Back – a bad habit in which the horse pulls back violently on the lead rope when tied.

Quarter Horse – A well-muscled, good-tempered, versatile breed that's popular among adults and children alike.

Quarter Pony – a pony of Quarter Horse type and disposition; commonly used as a children's mount.

Rearing – the raising up of a horse onto its hind legs. Rearing is especially dangerous when the horse is being led or ridden by a

human.

Recovery Time – the time it takes a horse's heart rate to return to an established resting rate.

Reins – the leather lines that attach to the bit and are held in the rider's hands to guide and control a horse.

Reined Cow Horse – a judged event in which the Western horse and rider pair must perform tasks related to cattle herding, plus a reining pattern. Also called working cow horse.

Reining – a judged event in which the Western horse and rider pair perform a pattern of circles and straight lines, with sliding stops and spins with one back leg planted in place.

Riding Sneakers – athletic-styled shoes designed specifically for riding, with steel reinforcement and an adequate heel.

Ring Sour – the attitude of a horse that doesn't enjoy being ridden in an arena.

Roping – a timed event in which the Western rider must chase and rope a steer.

School Horse – an experienced, usually older horse used as a lesson mount; also called lesson horse.

Schooling Show – a “practice” show for novice riders and advanced riders schooling “green”, or newly trained, horses.

Shetland Pony – smallest of the pony breeds, originating in the Shetland Islands.

Show Jumping – a timed event in which the English horse and rider pair must negotiate a course of fences without knocking any part of them down.

Showmanship – a halter class in which the handler is judged on his/her ability to present the horse effectively to the judge.

Shying — responding to a sound, movement, or object by suddenly jumping to the side or running off.

Snaffle Bit – a bit with a jointed mouthpiece and rings at the ends; works first on the corners of the mouth.

Spread – a jump that has two or more sets of poles giving it a horizontal spread as well as vertical height.

Spook/spooked/spooky – when a horse is startled or is easily startled.

Stallion – an unaltered male horse four years of age or older.

Star – a white patch on a horse's forehead.

Stirrup Leathers – the straps connecting the stirrups to an English saddle; also known as “leathers.”

Stirrups – the part of the saddle that supports a rider's feet; metal for English saddles (often called “stirrup irons”) and wood and leather for Western saddles.

Tack – the gear used on a horse, e.g. saddles, bridles.

Tacking Up – saddling and bridling a horse.

Topline – the outline of a horse from the top of his head to the top of his tail.

Thoroughbred – an English breed tracing to three Arabian sires. The world's premier race horse, but also used for a wide range of sports, especially jumping. The word refers specifically to a horse registered with The Jockey Club.

Trot – the two-beat gait between the walk and the canter.

Vaulting – gymnastic maneuvers performed on the back of a horse.

Vertical — a jump that contains only one set of poles or a wall and has no horizontal width.

Walk – the slowest gait, consisting of four beats.

Walk-trot Class – a class for beginning riders in which only the walk and trot are called for.

Warmblood – a general term for European breeds of sport horses. Examples include Dutch Warmblood, Hanoverian, and Holsteiner.

Welsh Pony – a pony originating in Wales; excellent for riding and commonly used as a children's mount.

Withers – the bony point at the base of the neck, just in front of where the saddle rests. A horse's height is measured from the top of the withers to the ground.

Working Cow Horse – a judged event in which the horse and rider pair must perform tasks related to cattle herding, plus a reining pattern. Also called reined cow horse.

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